

BOOK REVIEW

RIA LOOHUIZEN. 2006. **On Chestnuts: The Trees and Their Seeds**. (ISBN 1-903019-832-3, pbk.). Prospect Books, Allaleigh House, Blackawton, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 7DL, U.K. (**Orders:** www.oxbowbooks.com, 1-800-791-9354). \$17.95, 136 pp., 5 1/2" × 7 1/4".

"Chestnuts roasting by an open fire..." We are all familiar with the Bing Crosby song *White Christmas*, but few of us are familiar with the history and lore of the chestnut. Growing up in North Texas, I did not see a chestnut tree until I was an exchange student in Northern Ireland. The huge tree with its gigantic nuts made quite an impression when I came upon it in the dark Irish woods. Ria Loohuizen, a translator living in Amsterdam and the author of *The Elder*, has written a lyrical account of the horse chestnut and the sweet chestnut, complete with medicinal uses, historical notes, beautiful quotes from writers and poets, and recipes that are a wild food gourmet's delight. The petite book is divided into a section on horse chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, and a longer section on the European sweet chestnut, *Castanea sativa*. It is full of interesting facts. For example, the horse chestnut may have gotten its common name from the horseshoe-like shape of its leaf scars and the genus name *Castanea* is probably derived from the name of a city in Turkey. The sweet chestnut is native to southern Europe, the Caucasus, and North Africa. It is believed to have been brought to Europe by the Celts. A significant section of the book is devoted to the culinary applications of the sweet chestnut, which is the only nut with high levels of vitamin C, according to the author. The recipes include such delicacies as the classic roasted chestnuts, pumpkin chestnut soup, Roman-style chestnuts with lentils, chestnut bread, chestnut cookies, and several recipes for chestnut poultry stuffings. There are also cosmetic recipes, including an intriguing recipe for a hair conditioner made from horse chestnut leaves. Other interesting tips abound, such as using crushed horse chestnuts to keep insects out of potted plants. Recently, the horse chestnut has gained attention as the source of a treatment for chronic venous insufficiency (Suter et al. 2006). The American chestnut tree, *Castanea dentata*, has been a beloved fixture in the forests of the east coast of the United States, but it has been decimated by chestnut blight, a fungal disease imported from Asia. Let us hope that this book is not a eulogy, but rather an ode to the remarkable chestnut.—*Marissa Oppel, MS, Collections and Research Assistant, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, TX, 76102-4060, U.S.A.*

REFERENCES

SUTER, A., S. BOMMER., and J. RECHNER. 2006. Treatment of patients with venous insufficiency with fresh plant horse chestnut seed extract: a review of 5 clinical trials. *Adv Ther.* 23:179-190.